



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Honduras

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 43,278 square miles and a population of approximately seven million. An estimated 90 percent of the population was mestizo (mixed Amerindian and European), with small numbers of Amerindians (approximately 7 percent); persons of European, African, Asian, and Arab descent made up the rest.

There were no reliable government statistics on the distribution of membership in churches. The Roman Catholic Church reported a total membership of slightly more than 80 percent of the population. In a 2002 survey, the Le Vote Harris reported that 63 percent of respondents identified themselves as Catholics, 23 percent as evangelical Protestant Christians, and 14 percent as "other" or provided no answer. Anecdotal evidence and unreleased poll results suggested that the number of Protestant, including evangelical, Christians appeared to be growing to more than one-quarter of the population. The principal religious groups included Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Episcopal, Lutheran, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonite, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), and approximately 300 evangelical Protestant churches. The most prominent evangelical churches included the Abundant Life, Living Love, and Great Commission churches. The National Association of Evangelical Pastors represented the evangelical leadership. There were significant numbers of Christian missionaries from the United States. There were small numbers of Muslims and Jews. There was a mosque and a synagogue in San Pedro Sula and a synagogue in Tegucigalpa.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. However, the armed forces have an official Catholic patron saint. The Government consults with the Catholic Church and occasionally appoints Catholic leaders to quasi-official commissions on key subjects of mutual concern, such as anticorruption initiatives. Two of the prominent evangelical Protestant churches were represented on the board of the National Council of Anticorruption.

The Christian holy days of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Christmas are national holidays.

The Government does not require religious groups to register. The constitution grants the president the power to grant "juridical personality" to associations, including religious organizations. This status is a prerequisite to being accorded certain rights and privileges, such as tax exemptions. Associations are required to submit an application to the Ministry of Government and Justice describing their internal organization, bylaws, and goals. In the case of evangelical churches, the application then is referred to a group of leaders from the Evangelical Fraternity of Churches for review. This group has the power to suggest, but not require, changes. All religious applications also are referred to the Solicitor General's Office for a legal opinion that all elements meet constitutional requirements. The president signs the approved resolutions granting juridical personality. There were no reports that the Ministry of Government and Justice turned down any such application submitted by a religious group during the period covered by this report. The Catholic Church and other recognized religious organizations are accorded tax exemptions and waivers of customs duty on imports.

The Government requires foreign missionaries to obtain entry and residence permits. A local institution or individual must sponsor a missionary's application for residency, which is submitted to the Ministry of Government and Justice. The ministry generally grants such permits.

There are religious schools that provide professional training, such as seminaries, and church-operated schools that provide general education, such as parochial schools. They receive no special treatment from the Government, nor do they face any restrictions.

The law allows deportation of foreigners who practice witchcraft or religious fraud. There were no known cases of deportation under this law during the period covered by this report. In the fall of 2005, the Government issued a regulatory announcement to the application of Article 148 of the Law of Social Harmony that the press characterized as a crackdown on witchcraft in the countryside. (There is a longstanding tradition in the countryside of folk healers and fortune-tellers.) During the end of the period covered by this report, there were no complaints that the measure constituted a violation of freedom of religion.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

In 2000 the Congress adopted a controversial measure requiring that, beginning in 2001, all school classes begin with ten minutes of readings from the Bible. However, at the end of the period covered by this report, the legislation had not been put into effect.

The Catholic Church continued to seek the return of former properties of historic interest confiscated by the Government at independence in 1825; however, the Church has not submitted a formal request to the Government.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The Catholic Church designated the archbishop of Tegucigalpa as the national-level official in charge of ecumenical relations, and the archbishop has established an ecumenical and interreligious dialogue section within his archdiocese.

There were a few reports of discriminatory popular attitudes against persons of Arab descent, both first-generation immigrants and those whose families have resided in the country for generations. These attitudes occasionally resulted in negative media coverage of Islam and in unsubstantiated public statements by government officials linking Arab citizens to terrorist activities; this occurred despite the fact that most Arabs in the country were Christian.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. embassy also maintained a regular dialogue with religious leaders, church-sponsored universities, and religious organizations.

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